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Territorial cohesion, European social model and spatial policy research

Simin Davoudi

Abstract: This paper aims to: firstly, examine the concept of territorial cohesion within the context of the European model of society, suggesting that the concept is not only rooted in the European Model. It also extends its affiliation with *social*-protection to incorporate concerns about *spatial*-protection. As a result, the concept of territorial cohesion has re-conceptualised European spatial policy by adding to it a spatial justice dimension. Secondly, by drawing on the above conviction, it explores the ways in which the discourse of territorial cohesion has shaped the process and content of the emerging European spatial policy research and in particular the European Spatial Observation Network (ESPON) Program. Here, it is suggested that ESPON, through its program of research and process of networking, has provided a forum within which some of the underlying assumptions of the technical rational model, which has dominated European spatial policy research, are unraveled and challenged.

About the author: Professor Simin Davoudi is Director of CUDEM at Leeds Metropolitan University. She is: President of the Association of European Schools of Planning, Coordinator of the Planning Research Network that advises the UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on its planning research priorities, a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute's Research and Knowledge Committee, and a former expert advisor to the EU DG Environment. Her research, which focuses on European spatial planning and includes several ESPON-funded projects, is disseminated widely through publications and speeches at international events.

Contact: Centre for Urban Development and Environmental Management (CUDEM)
Leeds Metropolitan University
Brunswick Terrace, Leeds LS2 8BU, UK
Tel: +0113 283 1702, Fax: +0113 283 3190
Email: s.davoudi@leedsmet.ac.uk

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Introduction

There is now a growing body of literature devoted to tracing the origin and defining the ambiguous notion of territorial cohesion (Faludi 2004; Davoudi; 2004; *Town Planning Review* 2005). Particular attention has been placed on the definitions offered by an increasing number of EU publications, notably the Second and Third Cohesion Reports (CEC 2001 & 2004) and the emerging ESPON Progress Reports (ESPON 2004 & 2005). Most importantly, references are being made to the appearance of the concept in Articles I-3 and II-96 of the proposed EU Constitution, which, prior to the 'no' vote was seen as a sign of the significance of territorial cohesion in future EU policies. It was hoped that the reshuffling of the terminology may help overcome the lack of an EU competency in spatial planning.

If the territorial cohesion agenda enables such developments at the EU level, its spatial translation can be interpreted as the victory of two influential planning traditions in Europe which have already left a visible mark on the EU spatial policy¹. The first one is based on the French tradition of *aménagement du territoire* which has been described as the 'regional economic approach' to planning (CEC 1997). The other is based on the German tradition of the 'integrated comprehensive approach'. As Faludi (2004, 1355) points out, the former focuses on "the location of economic development and what government can do about it, while the latter "is more about balancing development claims against the carrying capacity of the land". In other words, one focuses on reducing territorial disparities and the other emphasises integrating sectoral policies. It can be argued that the former is a manifestation of the French egalitarian tradition and its concerns with equity, while the latter is an indication of the German's tradition of an 'holistic approach' as reflected in Heidegger's philosophical affiliation with nature. The territorial cohesion agenda clearly draws on both of these conceptions of space and spatial policy, which themselves are rooted in the 'European social model'.

This aim of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it examines the place of the concept of territorial cohesion within the European model of society, suggesting that the concept is not only rooted in the European Model (Faludi, see elsewhere in this set of papers). It also extends its affiliation with *social*-protection to incorporate concerns about *spatial*-protection. As a result, the concept has re-conceptualized European spatial policy by adding to it a spatial justice dimension. Secondly, by drawing on the above conviction, the paper explores the ways in which the discourse of territorial cohesion has, as a result, shaped both the process and the content of the emerging European spatial policy research and in particular the ESPON Program. It is suggested that ESPON, through its program of research and process of networking has provided a forum within which some underlying assumptions of the technical rational model, which has dominated European research, are unraveled and challenged.

Territorial Cohesion: *Spatializing* the European Social Model

The general term 'social model' refers to 'ideal types' which according to Max Weber are designed to capture the underlying similarities and differences of complex social phenomena (Martin and Ross 2004). Social models conceptualize the ways in which societies construct social interdependence. In market democratic social models, a

¹ This is taken as any EU policy which is spatially specific or is in effect spatial in practice (Williams 1996, 7)

combination of public policies, market mechanisms and kinship relations are drawn upon to “distribute obligations amongst interdependent members [who are] differently and unequally located in the division of labour and economically related to each other primarily by market transactions regulated by politically constructed institutions” (Martin and Ross 2004, 11). Social models shape people’s access to resources through income from work and welfare state provisions.

However, if we move away from ‘ideal type’ to reality we will observe as many European social models as there are European countries². In spite of these variations, the European social model refers to the systems of welfare state and employment relations which share enough commonality, with the exception of Britain, to be distinguished from the American or Anglo-Saxon model. While the former relies on public institutions and collective choice, the latter is dependent on markets and individual choice. The European model, hence, offers greater protection against economic insecurity and inequality. At the heart of both models lie centuries-old contested debates about the relations between the state, market and civic society, between individual liberty and social responsibility, between economic efficiency and social equity, between the state as provider and interventionist and the state as facilitator. In short, they raise significant political and normative issues.

The concept of territorial cohesion brings a new dimension to these debates by extending the application of the principles of ‘social models’ beyond individuals and social groups to places and territories. Hence, it suggests that different social models not only “decisively shape the structure of social stratification and the ways individuals are socialised and recruited into different social roles” (Martin and Ross 2004, 12). They also reconfigure the structure of territorial stratification and the ways territories are developed and perform different functions. Within the context of the European social model, territorial cohesion not only brings its embedded political tensions to the fore, it also gives them a spatial dimension.

Amongst the myriad of definitions of territorial cohesion offered by various EU publications, none territorializes the European model more clearly than the Third Cohesion Report. It draws on a simple, yet powerful, rationale to convey the meaning of territorial cohesion, stating that, “people should not be disadvantaged by wherever they happen to live or work in the Union” (CEC 2004, 27). This adds a radical new dimension to the debate about social models. It argues that individual’s life chances are not only shaped by social models which “affect how and to what extent individuals are subjected to and protected from typical biographical risks (unemployment, disability, poverty, illness, old age) throughout their life course” (Martin and Ross 2004, 12). They are also shaped by where they live and work; in other words, by the location and quality of places and territories. It suggests that the quality of places where people live and work in can influence their access to economic and social opportunities and the quality of their life. Hence, the concept of territorial cohesion *spatializes* the ‘biographical risks’ that people face throughout their life course. From this, it can be concluded that social models not only “conceptualise the ways in which different types of societies construct *social*

² Modifying Esping-Andersen’s ‘three worlds of welfare state’, Martin and Ross (2004, p.13) refer to the continental cases as being grouped into Bismarckian ‘conservative’ or ‘corporatist’, Nordic ‘social democratic’ or ‘universalist’, and Southern ‘dual’ or ‘familist’ categories, all of which being in contrast with the Anglo-American ‘liberal’ or ‘residual’ model

interdependence” (Martin and Ross 2004, 11 emphasis added), they also construct the ways in which they structure *territorial* interdependence. Thus, territorial development trajectories are as much dependent on the type of social models as the life chances of individuals.

While the term ‘social model’ is not itself political or value-laden, terms such as economic, social or territorial cohesion convey a strong normative dimension. They call for a specific social model which puts the emphasis on reducing disparities, inequalities and injustices; objectives that are arguably embedded in the European model of society. It is suggested, for example, that, “the cohesion principle expresses nothing but a concern for rebalancing the uncertain distributive effects of an internal market without borders and, in so doing, avoiding the pernicious risk of Europe disintegrating” (Janin Rivolin 2005, 95). Therefore, when the cohesion principle was agreed, the implementation of Community policy on territorial and urban issues became indispensable.

It is within this context that the territorial cohesion debate is closely linked to the wider debate about the European social model (Faludi, see elsewhere in this set of papers). It calls for an extension of the underlying principles of the European model from *individuals* to *places* and territories. It calls for solidarity, not only amongst European *citizens* but also amongst European *territories*. It extends the call for work-based *social-protection* to place-based *territorial-protection*. In the words of the Third Cohesion Report (CEC 2004, 27),

“the concept of territorial cohesion extends beyond the notion of economic and social cohesion by both adding to this and reinforcing it. In policy terms, the objective is to help achieve a more balanced development by reducing existing disparities, preventing territorial imbalances and by making both sectoral policies which have a spatial impact and regional policy more coherent”.

Thus, the concept has not only replaced the notion of ‘spatial planning’ within the EU arenas. It has also *re-conceptualized* it by emphasizing a new rationality for organizing European space. The discourse of territorial cohesion has added a *spatial justice* dimension to European spatial policy. In addition, and closer to the focus of this paper, this perspective has begun to challenge the conventional European spatial policy research and its dominant technical rational approach, as discussed below.

ESDP and the Evidence Base

Although it is now widely acknowledged that the publication of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (CEC 1999) marked a new era in European spatial policy field (Davoudi 1999; Faludi and Waterhout 2002), its contribution to the emerging European spatial policy research has been largely unnoticed and hardly analyzed. This part of the paper attempts to explore the link between the ESDP and the emergence of this new research agenda. It examines the ways in which the underlying assumptions of the dominant technical rational approach to European research have begun to be unraveled and challenged by this process and its substantive focus on territorial cohesion. Emphasis will be placed on the role of one of the key spin offs from the ESDP. This is a major Euro research program, which is jointly funded by the EU and the member states, called European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON).

Acknowledging the need for improving the evidence base of EU spatial policy goes back to the late 1980s (Gestel and Faludi 2005; Davoudi 2005) when the European Commission embarked on a series of studies which resulted into a number of reports notably Europe 2000 (CEC 1991) and Europe 2000+ (CEC 1994). Whilst these represented an important step in providing pan-EU spatial analysis³, their scope was confined to data collection, at a limited level, and description of spatial development trends. Hence, during the developmental stages of the ESDP it became clear that there was a need for improving the evidence base of the ESDP's policy framework and in particular its concern with territorial differentiation (Davoudi 2005). The policy vocabulary of the ESDP had presented difficult challenges of definition and policy application. While concepts such as 'polycentricity', 'cohesion', 'integration' 'territorial impact' and 'partnership' were (and still are) understood broadly, their precise meanings had remained elusive (Davoudi 2003). Furthermore, given that the spatial dimension in public policy had been neglected for many years, developing these ideas into analytical propositions and indicators for policy options proved to be difficult, particularly where trans-European comparisons were to be made. Hence, it was evident that a well-established and integrated conceptual base and a coherent body of research at the European level to further develop the ESDP's policy concerns was lacking. This was reflected in the First Official Draft of the ESDP which pointed to the need for undertaking,

“longer term research on relevant spatial issues as a part of continuing updating process of the ESDP. ... The European Observatory should concentrate on the technical and the scientific aspects of the drawing up and the periodic updating of the ESDP” (CSD 1997, 90).

Before exploring the formation of such an Observatory, it is important to highlight two characteristics of the upsurge of the Commission's interests in evidence-based spatial policy. Firstly, as is clear from the above extract, the desire to improve the evidence base was, and still is, coupled with a utilitarian view of research. The idea was to “set up of a network of study and research centres to gather data needed for spatial planning at the Community level” (ESPON 3.1, 2002, 13). The danger of such an emphasis on ‘research for policy's sake’ (Weiss 1977) is that it often leads to a highly selective construction of knowledge, leaving behind areas perceived as not having immediate policy relevance. A striking example of such neglect is the limited research, and even data, on the social, and to a lesser extent environmental, dimension of the territorial cohesion agenda; a point which I will return to later in the paper. Secondly, contrary to what the rhetoric of evidence-based policy suggests, the interface between evidence and policy is far from being unproblematic, linear and direct.

Such complications, along with political unease about entering into an unknown and potentially contested terrain, may well explain why the journey from recognition of a need for ‘a solid analytical base’ for the future development of the ESDP and the actual establishment of a research program took so long and was by no means swift and seamless. Another reason of course was the EU's labyrinthine financial procedures and the requirement for all fifteen member states to sign up to the program, despite the initial reluctance of some countries such as Spain. However, a

³ EU at that time consisted of 15 member states

major breakthrough came with the Commission's decision to support a one-year 'Study Programme on European Spatial Planning' (SPESP) in December 1998. This laid the foundation of the forthcoming ESPON by; firstly, clarifying the main areas of debate, the scope for future research questions, and the data availability at a pan-European level; and secondly, by bringing together a network of spatial planning researchers to carry out the work.

The SPESP was seen as a pilot project for testing the feasibility and desirability of setting up a network which could, through collaborative work, enrich existing spatial analyses and widen their scope to cover the European territory as a whole. The SPESP experience also revealed the extremity of the utilitarian view of research which was reflected in an explicit demand for researchers to come up with 'punchy policy messages', in spite of fragile analytical grounds. Such demands, although contested, continued to overshadow the process and timetable of the first round of ESPON projects. In order to have inputs from ESPON into the forthcoming Third Cohesion Report, the deadline for the final research outcomes was brought forward from 2004 to 2003. Furthermore, these outcomes had to be "designed in such a way that they [could] feed into discussions on EU policies" (Zonneveld and Waterhout 2005, 20).

Three years after publication of the SPESP Report (BBR 2001), ESPON was set up with its focus expanding from providing an analytical basis for the revision and updating of the ESDP to improving the evidence base for EU spatial policy, with territorial cohesion as its emerging rationale for organising European space. More importantly, ESPON began to evolve from a mere umbrella arrangement and a set of bureaucratic procedure for a research schema into a process of collective learning with the potential to question the relevance and effectiveness of the technical rational approach to research.

European Spatial Policy Research And Technical Rationality

The European research on spatial policy has been criticised for its technical nature and its over-reliance on quantitative data and indicators (Zonneveld and Waterhout, 2005). It is argued that research on EU spatial issues has remained "relatively descriptive in its analysis of European policy-making, or focuses on spatial development trends" which in turn is seen as the cause of the limited "understanding of the many ways in which new spatial focus is emerging across EU policy sectors" (Böhme et al. 2004, 1178). It is argued that less attention has been paid to the ways in which the emerging European spatial policy is shaping and conditioning national policy-making.

At some risk of simplification, such shortcomings can be attributed to the fact that the research in this area is largely grounded in the technical-rational tradition. Its footprint can be traced in a myriad of studies related to the evaluation of the Structural Funds or under the banner of spatial / territorial policy (including the work for Europe 2000 and Europe 2000+). The technical-rational approach is based on the assumption that 'objective assessment' and 'scientific advice', underpinned by positivist epistemology, will lead directly and un-problematically to better decisions. The technocratic nature of the EU policies with their emphasis on quantitative and relatively easy to measure indicators has helped reinforce the use of technical rational model. Schön (1999, 31) describes technical rationality as, "the heritage of Positivism... (as) the Positivist epistemology of practice".

As Owens et al (2004) point out, despite the extensive critique, the technical-rational model has had significant leverage in legislation, policy rhetoric and evaluation techniques. The resilience, and indeed popularity, of this model at both national and EU levels, can be attributed to the fact that “policy makers, social groups and researchers still implicitly cherish the classic concept of objective and value-free knowledge” (In’t Veld 2000, 7). For the policy-makers, its emphasis on ‘scientific’, ‘technical’ and ‘objectivity’ provides policy rationality and legitimization. It is seen as a “pragmatic resolution of the controversies in which they are embroiled” (Schön and Rein 1994, 37). For the professionals, it gives the impression of being sheltered from what Gandy calls, the “intrusion of the messy ambiguities of political debate” (Gandy 1999, 63).

The technical-rational model is distinguished from the post-positivist approaches, notably the deliberative processes of decision-making, by its assumption that a clear dividing line exists between: knowledge and power; experts and policy makers; technical and social dimensions; and objective and subjective knowledge. Within the ESPON too, such perceptions are shared among many participants, as clearly portrayed in a post-ESPON reflection by one of the leading researchers in ESPON. Drawing implicitly on the dualism embedded in technical rationality, Bengs (2004, 2) distinguishes between “the two worlds of politics and science” and argues that any intrusion from one to the other would be “an uneasy fusion because the two worlds [of policy and research] are very different from each other. Indeed they are perhaps even contradictory in many respects” (Bengs 2004, 2).

However, despite the existence, and may be even dominance, of such views in ESPON, this paper is based on the conviction that ESPON as a *program* of research and a *process* of networking has created an environment, most likely by default rather than by design, for social learning in which some of these assumptions are being unraveled and contested. The paper argues that instead of searching for a utopia where a neat dividing line exists between the ‘world of policy’ and the ‘world of research’, and where one straightforwardly feeds into the other and hence leads to better decisions, it is more constructive to acknowledge the existence of a world where these relations are closely interlocked. Furthermore, it is more useful to acknowledge that conflicts and tensions are inevitable in such a world, i.e. the real world. However, the issue is not how to eradicate them but how to treat them by being engaged in what Blackler (1995, 1034) calls, “... the process of knowing”. Despite its shortcomings, the ESPON process, with its relatively long time span, has created a window of opportunity for both policy makers and researchers to become increasingly engaged in this collective learning. The following two sections will elaborate on this proposition taking the process and the content in turn.

ESPON as A *Process* of Networking

Experts and Policy Makers

The technical-rational conceptualization of the knowledge-policy interface assumes the separation of roles and powers between the neutral, value-free expert advisors and the political, value-driven decision-makers. In this model, expert professionals are not supposed to be concerned about power and politics (Booher and Innes 2002), and politicians are not supposed to intervene in science and research. The post-positivist critique of technical rationality, however, rejects the concept of neutral, objective

science and its disregard for un-codified, non-technical forms of knowledge. It argues that in practice the technical processes are padded with hidden normative presuppositions and that there is an intricate interweaving of facts and values (Owens and Cowell 2002; Davoudi forthcoming). On the one hand, the ESPON experience has demonstrated the existence of these interrelationships. On the other hand, it has been instrumental in reinforcing them, despite the persistent desire to keep them apart. Its relatively unique institutional architecture, discussed below, has created an environment which has enabled and indeed encouraged crossing of these elusive lines by both policy makers and researchers. While this has not gone uncontested, and complaints about the perceived confusion of roles and powers have been rife (Bengs 2004), the resulting tensions and the need to manage them has led to a social learning process which has begun to question the separation of powers and roles between the users and producers of knowledge.

An illustrative example of this is the continuing engagement of the researchers in what is clearly a political role; i.e. pushing the spatial policy agenda higher on the Commission's order of priorities. Zonneveld and Waterhout (2005, 21), for example, argue that, "ESPON is used as a tool, by invoking 'hard' evidence, to convince politicians of the importance of the territorial dimension of sectoral policies". However, rather than considering this as an act of political expediency, it can be seen as the pursuit of an underlying value shared by most participants in ESPON, politicians and researchers alike. It also shows the blurring of the boundaries between science and policy and the manifestation of a dialectic relationship between power and knowledge, a point which I will come back to later. Indeed, researchers began to enter into what is seen as the sphere of politics, although not self-consciously, during the course of the 'Study Programme' when it became clear that uncertainties and political unease about the need for ESPON were rife. Although spatial planning was high on the agenda of the then Committee on Spatial Development (CSD) and had the backing of the Directorate General for Regional Policy (DG Regio), there were a lot of doubts in other parts of the Commission about the relevance and usefulness of a focus on territorial planning. Hence, the participating researchers in the program were not only engaged in 'scientific' research. They also found themselves in a quasi-lobbying position of promoting the spatiality of EU policies. In other words, they were clearly crossing the perceived dividing line between the role of knowledge-producers and that of knowledge-users; between policy and science.

As mentioned above, the institutional architecture of ESPON has a lot to do with creating the space for interaction, and the opportunity for challenging the deep seated technical-rational model. ESPON was set up in 2002 by bringing together policy makers and researchers from across Europe. The policy-making communities are represented by the Monitoring Committee of ESPON which consists of two delegates from ministries responsible for spatial planning in each member state, and two representatives from the Commission (DG Regio). The research community is a network of over 100 researchers from a range of disciplinary backgrounds who cluster around the Trans-national Project Groups (TPG). These consist of voluntary partnerships between researchers from several EU countries who are commissioned by the Monitoring Committee through a process of competitive tendering, to undertake specific projects.

Hence, like the ESDP, ESPON stands for not only a *program* of research, but also a *process* of networking. The networking nature of ESPON, which is now one of its constituent, and also novel, features, was contested initially. As Gestel and Faludi (2005) point out, at a ministerial meeting in Lisbon in 1992 questions were raised about whether the research program should be carried out by a European Planning Research Institute or by a network of existing research institutes in Europe. The former would have given the Commission a stronger voice and kept intact the formal hierarchical procedures of EU institutions which perpetuate the illusive separation of powers and roles. Some have even speculated that the Commission's intention to use the SPESP as a test phase for ESPON was based on an unspoken agenda to "show that networked research does not work, thus making the case for creating an institutional analogous to the European Environment Agency" (Williams 1999, 7).

Despite this, the network approach was adopted and indeed became pertinent to the creation of a dynamic forum which has continued to recruit new researchers to the program. This, plus the fact that all project reports are posted on the website and available for public scrutiny has reduced the risk of building up an unhealthy, closed and 'cozy' relationship between researchers and policy makers within what is known as 'the ESPON family'. The TPG networks are complemented with another network of professionals from each member state, called the ESPON Contact Points, who link the Luxembourg-based Coordination Unit with the national planning communities.

Knowledge and Power

The interfaces between policy and evidence and between experts and policy makers are also reflected in the interplay between knowledge and power. Francis Bacon's widely rehearsed dictum that 'knowledge is power' is a key tenet of Enlightenment. However, given the existence of often unequal power relations, knowledge can be used strategically to pursue specific policy direction. As discussed above, the outcome of the ESPON research and particularly its maps, whose visual power leaves a strong and enduring impact, has been drawn upon in a number of key EU documents (e.g. CEC 2004) to: influence the wider policy community, drive the spatial policy agenda, and help re-structure the distribution of EU funds. In other words, ESPON's *power of rationality* has been drawn upon to rationalize the emerging EU spatial policy.

On the other hand, ESPON demonstrates another dimension of the knowledge-power relationships which has been captured in Bent Flyvbjerg's dictum that 'power is knowledge'. He argues that, power "determine(s) what counts as knowledge, what kind of interpretation attains authority as the dominant interpretation" (Flyvbjerg 1998, 226). The strategic use of the *rationality of power* in ESPON is manifested in the powerful coalitions within the EU who sustain the hegemony of economic discourse and the supremacy of economic indicators in measuring EU policy outcomes. I will elaborate on this point later under the discussions about the development of a territorial cohesion index. The Monitoring Committee has often used its powers to challenge research findings, to pursue certain directions for the research and to insist on the types of evidence which is needed. As Zonneveld and Waterhout (2005, 19) state, "based on earlier experience, these policy makers have a good idea of what evidence is needed". ESPON processes provide an example of the ways in which power contextualizes the interface between evidence and policy and determines the extent to which evidence can influence policy or can change behavior. Researchers' appreciation of what gets to count as important is an integral part of

knowledge creation and a necessary step towards overcoming what Weiss (1975) calls the problem of 'little effects', referring to large amount of research which is never used in policy-making.

Technical and Socio-Political

Another and closely related tenet of technical rationality is its separation of what is seen as 'technical' and what is considered as 'social' and 'political' issues. Conventional European spatial policy research is littered with such assumed separations. Within this context, *technical* discussions among *experts* are often temporally sequenced and spatially segregated from *socio-political* discussions among *policy makers*. According to this perspective, any intervention by policy makers is considered as the intrusion of 'political powers' in the 'scientific authority'. For example, the fact that the Monitoring Committee was trying to "influence the selection of indicators for mapping the so-called 'Typology of Functional Urban Areas' (Zonneveld and Waterhout 2005, 21) is considered as an act of expediency rather than a political input into the process of constructing such indicators which, after all, are not necessarily technical; neither are they necessarily scientific or objective. As Faludi (2005, 5) points out, "territorial cohesion is a political concept whose function is to generate consensus. Razor-sharp criteria are not always helpful in achieving agreement".

Indeed, the real problem is not that the policymakers intervene in the discussions but, that they do not do so sufficiently and in a more inclusive, transparent and explicit manner. What the ESPON experience demonstrates is the confirmation of the post-positivist view that the relationship between science and policy and between the technical and the socio-political forms a continuum in which it is difficult to identify where and when one finishes and the other starts. In the context of ESPON, opportunities for *integrating* the discussions are provided at various levels. For example, the ESPON process of evaluation of project proposals and interim and final reports closely involve members of Monitoring Committee who, themselves, meet regularly.

Of particular significance in terms of integrating the technical and the socio-political debates are the ESPON's six-monthly seminars where the outcome of the projects are presented, debated, contested and defended by the participants. These encounters between researchers and policy makers have helped, over time, to create a social learning process where different types of knowledge are drawn upon to pursue its central objective of understanding, measuring and operationalizing the concept of territorial cohesion. This is not to suggest that the participants share a common understanding of what constitutes territorial cohesion and how best it can be implemented. It is rather to suggest that the opportunity exists, albeit still to a limited degree, for discursive dialogue and reciprocal learning among the participants, whose frames of reference may be widely apart.

One practical advantage of an integrated approach is that it raises the potential for political buy-in, or sense of ownership, of the research outcomes amongst the policy makers. This, within ESPON, has been a contested terrain, particularly when research has thrown in politically uncomfortable results with regard to the perverse impact of EU policies. A potent example is the seemingly adverse impact of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) on achieving territorial cohesion (ESPON 2004).

It is therefore not surprising that the Monitoring Committee insists on having the official disclaimer on all ESPON maps⁴. Despite this, however, the shared aspiration to push spatial planning on the EU policy agenda has already created a common platform from which a negotiated consensus between researchers and policy makers may emerge. While it is true that there are institutional and political barriers to knowledge transfer, more attention needs to be paid to the potential of penetrating such barriers by conceiving the scientific and technical as part of a social world. This is to say that knowledge transfer may become easier if the social and political were acknowledged as frameworks from the outset (Nutley et al 2003).

ESPON as A *Program* of Research

ESPON was set up as an ambitious four-year program of research which has, since its inception grown to include thirty research projects engaging a wide range of researchers from across Europe. Its research priorities are driven by the ESDP's central goal of achieving a more 'balanced European territory' and improving the knowledge base of EU territorial cohesion policy. As mentioned earlier, it is this substantive emphasis and its associated spatial justice perspective which has re-conceptualized the EU spatial policy and reframed its research agenda. And, by doing so, it has begun to unravel the inadequacies of the technical-rational approach to the construction of knowledge. I will return to this point after highlighting some of the shortcomings of the program.

ESPON was set up with the objective of developing "a *technical* framework through which to understand and monitor territorial development in the EU" (Zonneveld and Waterhout 2005, 20, emphasis added). A utilitarian, and in some instances opportunistic, view of research has also prevailed which insisted that ESPON has to "result in databases, quantifiable territorial indicators, evaluation models to assess the relationships between the EU policies and territorial development and, ... techniques for making sound and reliable maps" (Zonneveld and Waterhout 2005, 20). Furthermore, the scope of the program was determined by the conviction that devising spatial policy at the EU level requires pan-European analyses and interpretation. Hence, ESPON had to widen the scale of analysis to cover for the first time what is now known as the 'ESPON Study Area', consisting of 29 European countries⁵. Whilst the outcome represents an admirable achievement in providing new knowledge and valuable analysis at a pan-ESPON scale, it has had its drawbacks. Among these, the most notable is that the nature and scope of analyses has been almost dictated by the availability of harmonized and comparable data for the whole of Europe. This has inevitably led to a selective approach to the development of indicators, criteria, models and typologies, using those which could be quantified by pan-European data. It can therefore be argued that the *deepening* of knowledge about spatial development processes had to give way to the desire for *widening* the analysis. A longer-term concern is that the limitation of techniques and data availability would condition, if not determine, the relevance and legitimacy of certain forms of knowledge over others. For example, it is likely that, what would count as legitimate knowledge might

⁴ This states that, "this map does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the ESPON Monitoring Committee".

⁵ These include: 25 EU members, two candidate countries (Romania and Bulgaria) and two non-member states (Norway and Switzerland)

be a set of data and “relationships among selected variables or facts in isolation or abstracted from their social context” (Innes 1990, 232).

However, ESPON’s underlying goal to provide a better understanding of the concept of territorial cohesion, as defined in the first part of this paper, and to find ways of operationalizing it has already confronted the program with the challenge of searching for new ways of conceptualizing and measuring peripherality and imbalances. As mentioned before, the notion of territorial cohesion extends the European social model’s concern with social protection to a focus on spatial protection. This implies that territorial cohesion is about targeting places rather than sectors as the focus of policy, and measuring policy performance by the ways in which the ensemble of sectoral policies are affecting places and life chances of people who live and work there. The concept puts the spatial dimension of economic, social and environmental development at the heart of the EU policy agenda. It also calls for better integration of public policy and better coordination within and between governmental and non-governmental bodies.

The implication of this policy discourse for ESPON research has been twofold. Firstly, researchers and policy makers have had to revisit some of the traditional indicators used for spatial and regional policy, such as GDP and unemployment, which do not necessarily capture the spatial disparities that are associated with structural imbalances. Factors such as demography, population density, accessibility, urban-rural relations, access to basic services, and quality of life were seen as critical in understanding territorial differentiation. Secondly, quantifiable, pan-European indicators have had to be complemented by qualitative, in-depth case studies. The latter is a clear outcome of the collective learning process in which researchers have succeeded to convince policy makers of the need for and the value of case study research methods in achieving a better understanding of the fine-grained trajectory of spatial development.

A notable example of the ways in which ESPON projects have begun to challenge the traditional assumptions about the evidence-policy interface is the project on scenario building (ESPON 3.2, 2005). Its methodology, discussed below, sits uncomfortably with the technical-rational supposition about what constitutes knowledge.

Subjective and Objective Knowledge

One of the principal doctrines of positivism, as laid down by Auguste Comte, considers “empirical science as not just a form of knowledge but the only source of positive knowledge of the world” (Schön 1999, 32). From a technical-rational perspective, reliable knowledge is seen as knowledge which is objectively proven, scientific and based on positivist epistemology (Chalmers 1982). Hence, by subscribing to the view that ‘facts are facts’, it underplays the ways in which facts are interpreted and given meaning by our underlying conceptions and ‘frames of reference’ (de Magalhaes et al 2002, 55). Furthermore, a sharp division is deemed to exist between knowledge which is scientific, objective, systematic and explicit and the one which is considered as experiential, subjective, implicit and tacit. Within the positivist tradition, propositions which are neither analytically nor empirically testable are often held to have no meaning at all; “they are dismissed as ‘emotive utterance’” (Schön 1999, 32). Whilst the unacceptability of such a conception of knowledge is widespread (see Star 1992), it still features strongly in research and policy alike. The

ESPON process is no exception. The supremacy of 'scientific' research is so powerful that the term is often used not in an epistemological sense, but as justification of the validity and legitimacy of research outcomes.

The scenario project (ESPON 3.2, 2005), however, offers a different approach. Instead of insisting on the rhetoric of 'scientific' knowledge, it attempts to use deliberative processes to build up a discourse which incorporates not only objective and systematic knowledge but also subjective and experiential knowledge in order to draw a picture of possible and probable futures for territorial trends in Europe. It implicitly draws on the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*⁶ which refers to practical knowledge or wisdom and suggests that, "subjectivity is not an intrusion to be minimised but an essential constituent of practical rationality, in which intuition and appreciation of context are regarded as intellectual virtues" (Owens et al 2004 drawing on Flyvbjerg 2001). For example, the framing and re-framing of scenarios including the selection of key trends and themes and the criteria for the final choice of integrated scenarios have been achieved through a process of deliberation between researchers and policy makers where various forms of knowledge have been drawn upon.

The scenarios themselves are developed not to predict the future but to raise awareness. They are pedagogical and aim to raise the alarm among politician about the consequences of doing nothing, or choosing the wrong course of actions. The idea is to portray an explicit, and to some extent extreme, picture of the way in which strategic policy choices for the future of Europe can be conditioned not only by the social and economic trends but also by territorial structures of localities. The aim is to illustrate how such policy choices can lead to differentiated impacts on various territories, reconfiguring the balance of winners and losers. The emphasis is placed on provoking political debate based on justifiable and defensible, though not necessarily scientific, knowledge. Overall, the process of scenario building has enlarged the space for dialogue and collective learning. It has facilitated testing and adapting expert-based knowledge in practice through 'tinkering', which bonds explicit and tacit knowledge and contributes to knowledge creation (Hargreaves 1999). As Huberman (1993) emphasizes, such processes of social interactions can lead to development of shared meaning over time.

Economic and Social Indicators

A key contribution of ESPON to the debates about indicators has begun to emerge from the ongoing attempt to develop a European Territorial Cohesion Index (ETCI). The Index was to be used by the Commission for identifying areas in need of aid; in other words for the allocation of Structural and Cohesion funds. During the course of the project, such intentions were rejected, or made less explicit, by the researchers, and emphasis was put on developing a synthetic indicator to evaluate the scenarios (ESPON 3.2, 2005). The idea is to identify and develop criteria which reflect three key features of territorial cohesion; holistic, territorial and dynamic (ESPON 3.2 2005, 518-27). The *holistic* nature of territorial cohesion stems from its link with the German tradition of the integrated comprehensive approach to planning, as mentioned in the introduction to this paper. It is understood as covering not only economic

⁶ As opposed to *episteme*, concerning theoretical know why, and *techne* denoting technical know how (Owens et al 2004 drawing on Flyvbjerg 2001).

concerns, but also social and environmental considerations. In addition, it also includes the demographic dimension which, given the rising cost of an aging Europe, is now seen as a threat to the stability of the European model of society. The emphasis on *territorial* lies at the heart of the way in which the concept of territorial cohesion spatializes the European model's concerns with social-protection issues. The territorial dimension is to be captured through two key elements; multi-scalarity and accessibility. The former refers to the fact that the degree of 'cohesion' can fluctuate depending on the scale to which it is applied. This is to say that spatial disparities at, for example, national level may be masqueraded if the analyses are up-scaled to the EU level or down-scaled to the regional level. It is becoming evident, for example, that the pursuit of polycentrism at the European level has led to monocentrism at the national level, represented in over-concentration of population and economic activity, often in the capital cities or major urban centers. The Irish experience (Davoudi and Wishardt 2005) is likely to be replicated in the new member states which will be the main recipients of the EU funds in the near future (Davoudi, in press).

The second element of territoriality is *accessibility*, or parity of access as the ESPD puts it. Here the notion of accessibility applies to both 'services of general economic interests', as mentioned in the Amsterdam Treaty, and access to social and environmental services, resources and opportunities. These are shaped not only by work-based social-protection measures but also by place-based spatial-protection systems, as discussed earlier. Finally, the term *dynamic* points to the time dimension and the evolving nature of territorial cohesion. It emphasizes that the degree of cohesion and disparities not only changes across the geographical scale. It also ebbs and flows across the temporal scale, indicating that territorial cohesion cannot be captured in a snap-shot.

This multi-faceted nature of the concept and the problems of developing an index which can effectively capture complexity have confronted ESPON with not just a technical challenge but also a highly political one. Building the index requires combining various dimensions into one measurable indicator. This inevitably involves skilful use of techniques as well as hard political choices about the selection of criteria, weighing of variables and demarcating of thresholds. While the process is of immense significance for collective learning, and the outcome is crucial for placing territorial cohesion at the core of EU spatial policy; they are bound to be criticised for their limitations. Such composite and data-hungry indicators tend to become crude and restricted. However, as the experience of the United Nations in developing the Human Development Index (HDI) has shown, one can only effectively displace a crude yet convenient indicator such as Gross National Product (GNP), if one uses another convenient, albeit crude indicator (ESPON 3.2, 2005). As Amartya Sen points out, while the HDI has been criticized for its limitation, it has been praised for complementing the 'overused and oversold' GNP (Sen 1999, 23).

A strong parallel can be drawn with the current domination of GDP per capita in European regional policy (Grassland 2004). Indeed, the EU spatial policy field has been heavily influenced and largely handicapped by what I call the 'regime of Structural Funds', in which the 'region', expressed in statistical representation of NUTS II, has become the dominant unit of analysis, and economic achievement, represented largely by the GDP, the dominant indicator. This has even led to the reconfiguration of the administrative boundaries in some of the key beneficiaries of

the Structural Funds such as Ireland (Davoudi and Wishardt 2005) and more recently new member states. They have had to adjust their administrative tiers to fit the Structural Funds' regulation, despite the potentially adverse impact of such adjustments on governance relations and public access to decisions-makers (Mercier 2005, 61).

Hence, in the same way as the HDI has put human development on the world agenda, crossed disciplinary boundaries and brought together technical- methodological concerns with socio-political ones, the ongoing discussions in ESPON about the ETCI has the potential to place territorial cohesion on the EU agenda and provide a space for articulating the intricate interconnections between technical and political choices. These discussions, underpinned by the work of Claude Grassland and his team (ESPON 3.1, 2004; ESPON 3.2, 2005) have challenged technical rationality in two important ways. Firstly it has revealed how "techniques that claim to be purely technical often have an in-built tendency to support particular outcomes" (Owens et al 2004). Comparing two hypothetical indices of European territorial cohesion, one driven from the Lisbon Strategy's objectives⁷ and the other from the ESDP's objectives⁸, they have demonstrated how the former would result in concentration of the Structural Funds in the new member states, while the latter would shift the Funds to the Southern Mediterranean regions. The value of a hypothetical exercise such as this lies in its ability to illustrate the way in which implicit political choices, in terms of the selection of indicators, can be wrapped up in technical judgments to achieve certain aims.

Secondly, the work has highlighted how political choices to invest in collecting certain data and neglecting others have influenced the focus of research. Extensive work through a number of ESPON projects has revealed the hegemony of economic indicators within the EU databases which is sustained over time by the institutional power of, for example, EUROSTAT. While the environmental indicators are making their way into the EU policy discourses, they are heavily driven by data availability rather than policy goals, and are developed in a separate institution, the European Environment Agency (EEA), which has less clout when it comes to EU regional policy. Most striking are the limited attempts made to construct social indicators at the EU level. Out of 103 indicators developed so far within the ESPON projects, only four can be considered as social (ESPON 3.2, 2005, 524). The lack of European-wide, comparable regional data has led to the exclusion of such indicators and hence inhibited the construction of knowledge on an important dimension of territorial cohesion. Similar shortcomings exist in relation to quality of life indicators and issues of accessibility to basic services.

The dominance of economic indicators coupled with a lack of social, and to lesser extent environmental, indicators in ESPON, and more importantly EUROSTAT, has led to a 'vicious circle'. Here, research focused on what is available tends to be economically driven. This in turn feeds into a policy emphasis on the economic dimension of territorial cohesion, which then requires further investment in research based on economic indicators. It shows how the institutional setting and the economic policy discourse within the European spatial development research perpetuate this

⁷ i.e. knowledge-based economic growth

⁸ i.e. economic competitiveness, social cohesion and environmental sustainability

vicious circle and maintain the policy emphasis on the economic dimension of territorial cohesion. The conclusion so far is that “in the current statistical situation of the EU... it is impossible to build any relevant index of territorial cohesion at regional level which could combine the three dimensions of the ESDP” (ESPON 3.2, 2005, 525).

Breaking into this cycle needs political commitment and long-term investment in data collection and harmonization; as has been stressed throughout the ESPON process. However, given the intrinsic link between the concept of territorial cohesion and the European social model, such commitment depends largely on the future of the European model or more precisely on the balance of interplay between its economic competitiveness, social cohesion and environmental sustainability agenda. This takes us back to where we started. It places the debate on the future of territorial cohesion and its research agenda at the heart of what can be called the dilemma of the European model; a point by which this account will come to the conclusion.

The Dilemma of the European Social Model: A Concluding Remark

The European model and all its variances are the construct of decades of social negotiations and compromises over the balance of relationship between the state, market and the civil society. As a result, the interplay between economic efficiency and social equity has fluctuated over time and in different countries. Despite the general resilience of the model it has not been immune from both exogenous pressures, such as globalization, and indigenous challenges such as the shift from manufacturing to services and the slow-down in productivity and economic growth which has made it difficult for the welfare systems to meet the growing demand arising from the changing demographic patterns and family structures (Pierson 2001). These pressures have triggered, and will do so more forcefully in the future, conflicts over distribution of resources along what Martin and Ross (2004,15) call “new cleavage lines”.

Among the exogenous factors the most relevant and more powerfully exerted is the political decoupling of European economic integration and social-protection issues which, as Scharpf (2002, 646) points out, “has characterised the real process of European integration from Rome to Maastricht”. Such decoupling would not have happened if the French Socialist Prime Minister, Guy Mollet, had had his way in the Treaty of Rome, and established the harmonization of social regulations as a precondition for the integration of industrial market. However, if in 1957 such harmonization was difficult to achieve among six countries, with more or less similar social models, it is now increasingly impossible when 25 divergent countries are involved (Scharpf 2002).

This decoupling has created an inherent and persistent tension between the EU economic competitiveness and cohesion policies. The conflict reached new heights following publication of the Lisbon Strategy which was damned by some political constellations as a move too far towards Anglo-American ‘ultra-liberalism’. Similar sentiments have now enveloped the discussions about the proposed Constitutions with parts of the French and Dutch ‘No Camp’ arguing that it is ‘too Anglo-Saxon oriented’. However, this economic emphasis which is seen by some quarters as a new step towards the erosion of the European social model is not new. Similar debates emerged after the introduction of the Single European Act which among other things

liberalized hitherto protected, highly regulated and often state-owned public services including transport, telecommunication infrastructure and energy. All this is the continuation of the hegemony of an economic policy discourse which has framed the European agenda mainly in terms of economic integration and liberalization (Scharpf 2002). It is this hegemony that has led to continuing investment in the work on economic data and indicators at the expense of social ones, as mentioned above.

As Scharpf (2002, 665) argues, the advancement of EU economic integration since 1950s “has created a fundamental asymmetry between policies promoting market efficiencies and those promoting social protection and equality”. This has largely reduced the capacity of member states to influence the direction of their economies and to realize self-defined socio-political, and by extension spatial, goals. For example, European deregulation policies have taken away the use of public sector industries as an employment buffer at the time of economic decline. Furthermore, European competition policy has largely disabled the use of state aid in reducing regional disparities and increasing territorial cohesion; an issue which is central to the political negotiation on the post-2006 distribution of Structure Funds.

The asymmetric development of the Europeanization process has led to an increasing demand for re-creating a level playing field and re-coupling of social-protection and economic-integration functions at the European level. However, given the diversity of national systems and the political salience of these differences, upon which people have based their life plans, it seems almost impossible to reach a common European solution (Scharpf 2002, 652). Similar dilemmas can be observed in the context of territorial cohesion agenda. Here, neither the subscription to a European spatial planning Directive nor the harmonization of national planning systems seem to be a feasible way forward, given the diversity of such systems and their underlying social philosophies and cultural values.

In order to get round this dilemma, a new governing mode called the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) has been proposed by the EU which aims to protect and promote ‘social Europe’. The emphasis is on policy learning through information exchange, benchmarking, peer review, deliberation, voluntary cooperation, and naming and shaming (Begg et al 2001). While OMC has been applied mainly to the field of employment, as Faludi (2005) suggests, it can be extended to the field of territorial cohesion and spatial planning. Indeed, the ESDP process and its subsequent impact on national strategies (ESPON, 2.3.1, 2005) shows that this may be the way forward.

Within this context, arenas such as ESPON have a major role to play, not only as a program of research for identifying best practice and criteria for benchmarking, but also as a forum for deliberation and social learning among researchers and policy makers. The ESPON experience so far has demonstrated that procedures that are regarded as technocratic have in practice provided a forum for dialogue “within which knowledge can be assembled, arguments can take place, and learning may occur within and between different coalitions” (Owens and Cowell 2002, 71). It has confirmed that even predominantly technical procedures have the potential to provide, as unintended effect, considerable space for deliberation and learning. Hence, to see them merely as technical rational activities would be to underestimate their long-term effects.

Hence, ESPON can be considered as a step forward in the European research. Notwithstanding major shortcomings, ESPON has: deepened and widened the Europeanization of spatial policy research; established a new institutional architecture which has helped reducing the gap between experts and policy makers; and, created a platform from which a more powerful voice for promoting the spatial dimension of EU policies has emerged. More importantly, despite its continuing preoccupation with technical rationality, it has confronted the policy and research communities with the challenge of moving beyond that to include post-positivist models. As a result, ESPON has advanced our understanding of the spatialization of European social model.

However, for ESPON to be able to fulfill its wider role as a forum for knowledge production and knowledge transfer, it is crucial that concerted efforts are made to widen its research agenda and method of analysis to incorporate qualitative and in-depth inquiries into the diversity of spatial trends across Europe. It is also paramount that the technical analyses are complemented by discursive approaches particularly when problems are complex and poorly structured; as is the case with the concept of territorial cohesion. Furthermore, critical research into the differentiated impact of EU spatial policy on national and regional development needs to be an integral part of this wider program. Finally, any attempts to shrink the space for interaction between researchers and policy makers should be resisted if the goal is to promote long term learning processes through which knowledge can inform and even reframe policy problems. Making such critical research possible is vital for finding a negotiated way forward for pursuing the European social model particularly in the current climate of the growing tensions about the future of European integration.

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